

END OF PSALM 126

You are Psalms

Some people think you never get discouraged, but the fact is, when you do, you know where to run. Your prayers are open and honest because you realize that God already knows your heart, He's just waiting to hear you spill it. And when you do, what starts out as heavy ends up becoming a song of praise. You may struggle... and often you do... but each time, you grow in your understanding of God's faithfulness. You're just a song waiting to happen.

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PSALMS (SONGS OF PRAISE)

TRUST
IN THE
LORD *and do good;
dwell in the land and
enjoy safe pasture.*
PSALM 36: 3

PSALM NUMBER: 126

Nothing can be done without God's grace and blessing.

1. Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it. Unless the Lord keep the city, he watcheth in vain that keepeth it.
2. It is vain for you to rise before light: rise ye after you have sitten, you that eat the bread of sorrow. When he shall give sleep to his beloved.
3. Behold, the inheritance of the Lord are children; the reward, the fruit of the womb.
4. As arrows in the hand of the mighty, so the children of them that have been shaken.
5. Blessed is the man that hath filled his desire with them; he shall not be confounded when he shall speak to his enemies in the gate.

The Psalms are songs of praise and cover a period of about 1000 years, from the time of Moses (ca. 1400 B.C.) to the Israelites' return from exile (ca. 450 B.C.). They deal with selected events of that period and provide us with the thoughts and feelings of those who went through the experiences recorded. After being made a Cardinal by Pope Clement VIII, Saint Robert Bellarmine, prepared for posterity his very own commentary on each of the Psalms. Enclosed are his interpretations on each of the Psalms.

PSALM NUMBER: 126

EXPLANATION OF THE PSALM

1. “Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it. Unless the Lord keep the city, he watcheth in vain that keepeth it.” These words were addressed to the Jews when they were building the house of God, that is, the temple, at the time that the work was progressing but slowly, by reason of the obstructions offered by the surrounding nations, as we read in 1 Esdras. They are admonished to bear in mind that the work of man is of no value, unless God, the principal builder, be there to help them; and, therefore, that they should work not only with their hands, but also with their hearts and their lips, in invoking God, and confiding mainly in his help. “Unless the Lord build the house;” unless God, on being invoked with confidence, assists the workmen, “they labor in vain that build it;” all their labor is gone for nothing, and will be so. This is also addressed to the heads of the Church who, by the preaching of God’s word, seek to bring souls to him, and of them, to build up a temple, (the Church,) to the Lord, as we read in Corinthians, “you are God’s building;” and further on, “as a wise architect I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon.” But unless the primary architect be there, he who said, “on this rock I will build my church,” in vain will men build, and doctors preach, because, as the Lord himself said, “without me you can do nothing.” The same applies to everyone of us, for we are bound, through acts of faith, hope, and love, to build up a house in heaven; for, as St. Augustine has it, “such a house is founded on faith, built up on hope, and finished off by charity; nor is anyone who has not previously prepared such a house ever admitted as a citizen in the heavenly country.” Such a house is constructed rather by prayer and lamentation, than by manual labor, because, “we are not sufficient to think anything of ourselves, as of ourselves.” – “Unless the Lord keep the city, he watcheth in vain that keepeth it.” When the city was being built after the captivity, they had to build it and guard it at the same time, as we read in 2 Esdras. The nations roundabout them not only sought to prevent them from building, but they demolished everything that was built if they could; and thus the children of Israel had to proceed with the sword in one hand, and the tools in the other and many had to stand guard continually. Yet all this guarding would have been of no avail, and not the Lord chosen to guard the city. This, too, applies to the heads of the Church, whose duty it is both to build it up, and to guard it. Because we are surrounded by enemies, who hate nothing more than the extension of the Church, and though bishops get a very high position in the Church to look out as if from a watchtower, from which they can see everything, and thus guard the people;

still, as they cannot penetrate men's hearts, nor be everywhere with everyone, they cannot but feel that "unless the Lord keep the city, he watcheth in vain that keepeth it." The same is very apt to occur to ourselves, when we, through good works, begin to build up the house, for enemies will not be wanting to seek to destroy the work so begun, by various temptations; and, hence, the apostle arms us when he says, "wherefore take unto you the armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day;" and a little further on, "in all things taking the shield of faith, wherewith you may be able to extinguish all the fiery darts of the most wicked one." But unless God be with us, to guard us who slumber so often, and fight for us, all our labor will be in vain.

2. "It is vain for you to rise before light: rise ye after you have sitten, you that eat the bread of sorrow. When he shall give sleep to his beloved."

3. "Behold, the inheritance of the Lord are children; the reward, the fruit of the womb." The children of Israel, in their anxiety, while so harassed, were wont to rise before day, in order to expedite the building; and, therefore, the Holy Ghost admonishes them that there turning to work before day would be of no advantage to them, unless the Lord would assist them; but with him as a helper, with their hope firmly reposed in him, that the work would go on prosperously, even though they may not go to work until after the rising of the sun. "It is vain for you to rise before light;" you have no business whatever in beginning to work before day, unless the Lord shall build with you; and, therefore, trust in him, put up your prayers constantly to him. "Rise ye after you have sitten;" after the necessary rest of the night, rise to your work, "you that eat the bread of sorrow," you who now lead a miserable and a sorrowful life by reason of the continual harassing of your enemies. In the meaning more in the mind of the Holy Ghost that prelates of the Church, and the faithful, individually, are admonished, that in the building of a house, whether for themselves or for a community, they should not confide more in working than in praying, and should seek to imitate our Lord, who watched all night in prayer, as we read in Luke, "and he passed the whole night in the prayer of God," while by day he addressed people, and confirmed what he said by miracles; as also the apostle, who says in the Acts, "but we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." – "It is vain for you to rise before light," to waste all your time in building and watching it. "Rise ye after you have sitten," go to your work after you shall have rested in prayer and contemplation. "You that eat the bread of sorrow;" you who, in your longings for your heavenly country, daily groan and exclaim, "my tears had been my bread day and night, whilst it is said to me daily, where is thy God?" For ardent lovers, when they cannot behold the thing they love, are supported by sighing and groaning for it, and thus their tears become bread to them day and night; that is, a dinner by day and a supper by night. "When he shall give sleep to his beloved." He now consoles them after his exhortations and admonitions, prophesying that it would come to pass, that after the present tribulations God would give peace to his people, and that the children of Israel would be manifestly "God's inheritance," would become so powerful and so brace that they would never again have to suffer anything from the enemy, a prophecy that

concerns the new people; that is, the Church of Christ, of which the temple and the city were a type. For as St. Augustine proves, after the restoration of the city and the temple, matters were every day getting worse with the Jews, until the city was laid in ruins, and the temple burned, under Titus and Vespasian. He, therefore, says, "when he shall give sleep to his beloved," when he shall have given peace and rest to his people, by sending them the true Solomon, to build up the real temple, the Church which he will establish and propagate, and to which he will subject all the rulers of the world. "Behold, the inheritance of the Lord are children, the reward the fruit of the womb;" that is to say, then, it will appear that many children are the inheritance of the Lord, as he says in Psalm 2, "ask of me, and I will give thee the Gentiles for thy inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth for thy possession," and the "reward" of the same Christ our Lord will be the fruit of the womb; that is, many children, according to Isaias, "if he shall lay down his life for sin, he shall see a long lived seed;" for, as we have frequently remarked, repetitions are of most common occurrence in the Scripture, and thus, "the inheritance of the Lord are children," is one and the same with "the reward the fruit of the womb;" that is to say, the inheritance and the reward of Christ our Lord, will be many children, who are nothing else than the fruit of the womb. If we look for a more sublime meaning in these words, we must make them foretell the happiness of the Jerusalem above; that is, which awaits those, who, in the Resurrection, after the sleep of a temporary death, hastened, as they ought, to get up to their country on the wings of faith and love; and he, therefore, says, "when he shall give sleep to his beloved;" when, after various labors and contests, God shall give all his beloved, the pastors of his Church, who were its builders, as well as the faithful, in particular, will built up their own house by good works, the sleep and repose of a happy death. "Behold the inheritance of the Lord are children; the reward, the fruit of the womb." It will appear on the day of judgment, that God's children are God's inheritance, because they will then obtain life everlasting, and will pass over to the everlasting possession and inheritance of God; and they will also be the reward of Christ, who is the fruit of the womb, because the salvation of the elect is Christ's reward, inasmuch as it was he, who, by his sufferings and death, got grace and glory for them.

4. "As arrows in the hand of the mighty, so the children of them that have been shaken." The Prophet now relates the strength of the children of Christ, who are his inheritance and his reward, and says, they will have great strength and power, as great as the arrows that are shot from the bow of a strong and powerful archer, which pierce everything; and this is only in reference to this is only in reference to their spiritual strength, which is as remarkable in its action as it is in its power of endurance; for when they confound like thunder and lightning, when they bring infidels to the faith, or sinners to penance,, by the fire of their preaching, by the brightness of their sanctity, and by the power of their miracles; and when, in their struggles for the faith and for piety, they endure, even unto death, all manner of torments with the most incredible patience and fortitude, what else are they but arrows in the hand of the mighty? But why are those brave children called "the children of them that have been shaken?" Because, they are the children of the outcasts and the wretched, the children of the prophets and the apostles, and of the

former, the apostle writes, Hebrews 11, "others had trial of mockeries and stripes, moreover also of bonds and prisons, they would stoned, they were cut asunder, they were tempted, they were put to death by the sword, they wandered about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being in want, distressed, afflicted; of whom the world was not worthy;" and, speaking of the apostles, the same apostle says, 1 Corinthians 4, "for I think that God hath set forth us, apostles, the last, as it were, men destined to death; because we are made a spectacle to the world, and to Angels, and to men. Even unto this hour, we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no fixed abode; and we labor, working with our own hands; we are reviled and we bless; we are persecuted, and we suffer it; we are ill spoken of, and we entreat: we are made as a refuse of this world; the off scouring of all even till now." And yet, they, so shaken off and rejected, turned out to be the bravest of the brave, and had a most extraordinary triumph over the world and the demons. All the elect are the children of the aforesaid, who, "like arrows in the hand of the mighty," have wounded and conquered their enemies.

5. "Blessed is the man that hath filled his desire with them; he shall not be confounded when he shall speak to his enemies in the gate." He now concludes the Psalm by long and loud congratulations to Christ our Lord. "Blessed is the man that hath filled his desire with them." Truly happy is he, Christ to wit, "that hath filled his desire with them;" his children, because he got the full extent of his desire, the salvation and glory of his children, for whom he died and suffered so much for; and therefore, "he shall not be confounded when he shall speak to his enemies in the gates;" that is to say, in the Last Judgment, that will be held in a tolerably extensive gate; for it will be in the assemblage of the whole world. "He shall not be confounded when he shall speak to his enemies," be they demons or sinners; but he will rather confound them, and bring them in guilty of injustice and imbecility; for the whole contention between Christ and the devil and his ministers, from the beginning to the end of the world, turned upon the salvation of mankind, on whose ruin the evil spirit was always bent, and in order to effect which he raised up, in so many succeeding ages, so many persecutions of Jews, pagans, heretics, and bad members of all classes against the Church. But when, on the day judgment, the countless thousands of the elect reigning in glory with Christ, crowned in triumph, and in great rejoicing shall appear; and, on the other hand, the wicked shall appear deprived of all power, and having been justly condemned to eternal punishment, shall have no hope of getting up the war again, then Christ, instead of being confounded, will confound all his enemies.